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FOUND AT LAST



History of the
**Invention
Merit Badge**

History Of the Invention Merit Badge

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The very first official merit badges to be awarded by the Boy Scouts of America took place in 1911. There were a total of 83 earned and presented that first year to 30 different Boy Scouts from around the country. Of the fifty-seven types of merit badges available then, only twenty-one of the varieties were awarded in 1911. Going by information printed in the Second Annual BSA Report presented on February 8, 1912, the very first Boy Scout to have been awarded merit badges through the National Council was Richard Burckes of Waltham, Massachusetts. He earned six of them and the first one he received was Swimming.



Invention Merit Badge, Earned By Stephen Porter

The most famous merit badge in national BSA history, at least among collectors, is the Invention Merit Badge. It was one of the original "official" fifty-seven merit badges first authorized by the BSA in 1911. It was also one of the two shortest lived. It was announced in the July 1914 issue of Boys Life on page 28 that "The Merit Badge for Invention will be discontinued after October 1 (1914). This was decided recently by the National Committee on Badges, Awards and Scout Requirements, the action being approved by the Executive Board. Claims for merit badges for Invention should be taken up with the National Headquarters [at this time.](#)"

The reason it was terminated was mentioned in the October 1916 issue of Boys Life Magazine on page 46. "Question: Why did the merit badge for Invention go out of use? Answer: Because of the cost. Experience proved that it encouraged boys to invest more than they could afford in equipment which might be of little or no value to them." However in the May 1st, 1914 issue of Scouting Magazine on page two it mentioned a different reason. A new merit badge, "Physical Development" was added to the list of fifty seven available to earn. It states "It was voted to eliminate the Badge for Invention so that the number of merit badges remained at 57". The board apparently wanted to maintain the badges available at 57 so one had to go and that one was Invention. So if you ask a trivia question of "What merit badge replaced the Invention merit badge in 1914?", the correct answer is the Physical Development merit badge. Even though it was only available to earn part of that first year, there were five Physical Development merit badges awarded in late 1914. With that said there is a list of the 57 merit badges available to earn in the April 1914 issue of Scouting Magazine. On the list is the

Physical Development merit badge and already taken off the list is the Invention merit badge. It strongly appears that the decision to end the Invention badge was done early in 1914 even though it officially ended on October 1st. It would seem logical that if the BSA wanted to maintain the number at 57 and that if the Invention merit badge was available to earn until October 1, 1914 that the Physical Development Badge would not have been available to earn until after October 1 1914. The number of Physical Development badges issued in 1914 (five) seems to back this up.

In the national BSA Reports to Congress it is stated that the Invention Merit Badge was awarded to ten Scouts total. None were awarded in 1911 or 1912 but one

was awarded in 1913, eight more in 1914 and a final one awarded in 1915. Some collectors question whether any Invention merit badges were actually physically produced. The answer to that is yes they were.

Time seems to have erased the names of the ten recipients but records from that era still exist that in fact do name at least two of them and a third one has been identified through his awards and a news article which still exist. One was a Scout in Washington DC in the teens. He was a member of Troop 32 and the Invention Merit Badge was the 38th merit badge that he had earned. He went on to earn fifty-one of the fifty-seven available at that time. He became an Eagle Scout in 1914. He was seventeen years old when he received the Invention merit badge during the week of June 7th, 1914. He was one of ten BSA members to receive merit badges that evening and the only one of the ten to receive the Invention badge. He had received his Eagle Scout badge at a White House ceremony in early 1914. President Wilson was suppose to pin it on him and several others but was too ill that day so Mrs. Wilson did the honors.

The second known named recipient of the Invention merit badge was an adult Scoutmaster from Brooklyn, New York. Keep in mind that scout advancement was available to youth AND adult members for many years up until 1965. Adults could and did earn and receive merit badges and ranks up to and including Eagle Scout and were encouraged to do so by the National Council in the early years in order to serve as an example for Scouts to follow. The Brooklyn Scouter was 43 years old when he received the Invention Merit Badge. He was a registered Scoutmaster and

a noted chemist by occupation. He held numerous patents and once testified before the U.S Supreme Court as a expert witness. The one invention of his that seems to be the closest by issue date to when he received the Invention Merit Badge was for a oil separator.

The third known recipient of the Invention merit badge was a eighteen year old Eagle Scout from Fayetteville, New York.

The core requirement of earning the Invention Merit Badge was that you had to literally invent something and get a patent on it. What the seventeen year old Scout invented was a unusual uniform coat and one that advanced Scout collectors would recognize. In the teens there existed a BSA uniform coat that had a removable false sleeve that merit badges and rank badges could be sewed to or pinned to. You could wear the sleeve over the regular sleeve or remove it as desired to keep your badges from being soiled while out in the field. That was his invention. His patent number was US 1162523 and the patent was applied for in 1914 and approved in 1915 yet he received his Invention merit badge in June 1914. The application included a sketch of his coat invention. His invention was actually put into production and sold by the BSA. It is presumed that his badges and awards were worn on his personal prototype "false uniform sleeve". With the advent of the merit badge sash in 1924 the false sleeve uniform coat went out of use although some still exist among advanced collectors.

The name of the young seventeen year old inventor of the BSA false sleeve and Eagle Scout was Graeme (pronounced Graham) Thomas Smallwood of Washington, DC. He later married a girl from Toledo, Ohio and they had twins in 1919 while living in Toledo. Washington DC newspapers in 1914 stated that he was the only Scout to ever receive the merit badge and likely ever would be as it was about to be deleted from the list of badges. That information however was incorrect as far as him being the only recipient. Graeme Smallwood was Eagle Scout #81 in national BSA history.

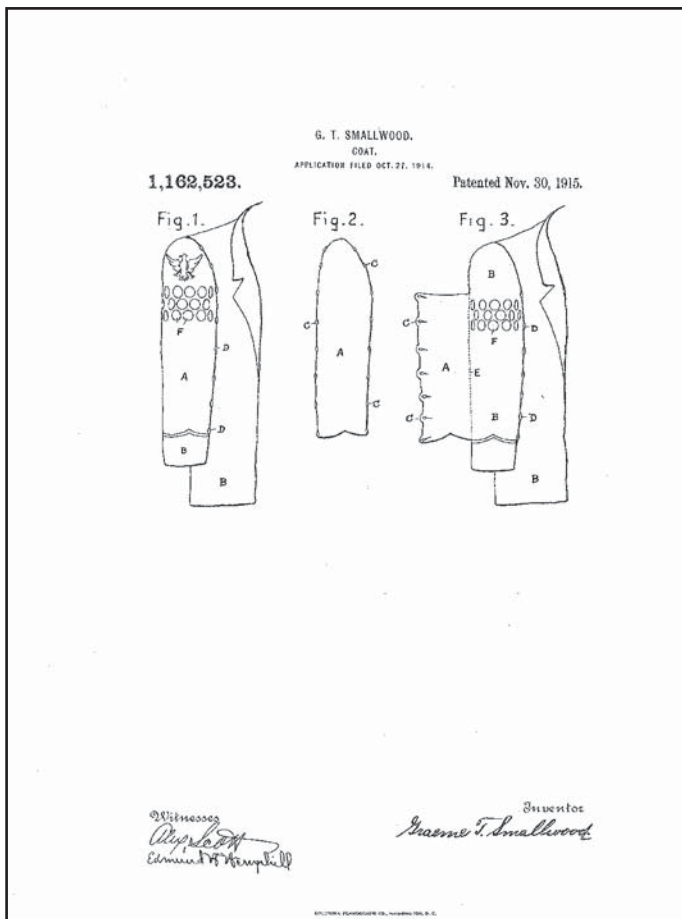
The name of the Brooklyn Scoutmaster who received the Invention merit badge on October 13, 1914 was Frederick L. Maywald Sr. News accounts state that he was the first person in Brooklyn to receive the Invention merit badge. The night he received it at a gigantic Court of Honor in Brooklyn, over five hundred merit badges were given out to both Scouts and adult Scouters and fifteen adults and youth members were presented with the Eagle Scout Badge. James E. West and Dan Beard were in attendance. Beard gave a talk about personally feeding wounded Civil War soldiers some pears while they were recuperating when he was a boy. James E. West was taken back by the sheer volume of merit badges that were awarded that night and questioned if the requirements were fully met. He gave a speech and said in the



Graeme T. Smallwood

future it was going to get harder to earn a merit badge. At that time it already required a review board of three adults and/or one expert in that particular field to pass a given merit badge.

The name of the Fayetteville Eagle Scout was Stephen Porter. He joined the BSA at age 15 in 1911 and by July 17, 1914 (just after his eighteenth birthday) he had earned 56 of the entire 57 original merit badges. That is an average of nineteen merit badges a year for three years. The last one he needed in order to have them all was the Invention merit badge. He was working on three different inventions at that time in the hope of receiving the Invention merit badge. He was among the very earliest recipients of the Agriculture, Blacksmithing, Dairying, Aviation, Stalking, Angling, Taxidermy, Archery and Ornithology (Bird Study) merit badges. And as it turned out he did earn the Invention merit badge and was one of the ten recipients. Although a member of the BSA in 1911 he did not receive any of his merit badges in 1911 as his name is not listed as one of the thirty Scouts who earned them that year. Or at least he was not credited with earning any in 1911. Stephen Porter was Eagle Scout #105 in national BSA history.



Drawing from Patent Application For False Sleeve



Sample of BSA Produced "False Sleeve" - Front

Based on the BSA annual reports, there were seven others besides the Washington DC Eagle Scout, the Brooklyn Scoutmaster and the Fayetteville NY Eagle Scout who received the Invention Merit Badge. The Invention merit badge officially ended October 1, 1914 so it is presumed the lone 1915 recipient received special permission from national headquarters to continue working on it after October 1st. There are many sources in print that state the Invention merit badge ended in 1915 and others state it ended in 1917 and the BSA itself quotes 1915 as well as 1918. The official end date was the first day of October in 1914 with the last badge being awarded in 1915. In the national annual BSA reports printed in the late teens they included a summary of merit badges awarded with the years listed for years 1911 through about 1918. People have misinterpreted (myself included) those summary lists over the years to mean that the Invention merit badge was available though 1917 or 1918 and it was not. If the summary had only been for years 1916 and later, the Invention badge would not have been included in the summary and even though one was awarded in 1915 it officially ended on October 1st, 1914. If you look at the Physical Development merit badge those same later summaries show a zero after it for years 1911, 1912 and 1913 and only five awarded in 1914. They show a zero because it did not exist in 1911, 1912 or 1913, not because none were earned, but you can read the summary and assume it was available to earn and it was listed that way. The BSA did not differentiate in the summaries between when a badge was not earned and



BSA Logo From Inside of False Sleeve Pictured Above

when it did not exist. It has caused a lot of confusion over the years.

The identities and stories of the remaining seven recipients remains to be rediscovered. I believe that the identities of the



Sample of BSA Produced "False Sleeve" - Reverse

remaining seven are listed in newspaper microfilm around the country that has not yet been digitalized. How many of the remaining seven recipients were adults is unknown but my guess would be the majority of them. Yet at least one of the ten was a Boy Scout under the age of eighteen. Graeme Smallwood was quite a distinguished Boy Scout in his day. He was present at and served as one of four Eagle Scout sentries at the groundbreaking ceremony of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC in 1914. During the 1914 National BSA meeting he was also present as a young Eagle Scout. There is a photo of him in uniform with Ernest Thompson Seton, Dan Beard and other high ranking officials attending the meeting. Graeme left college at the end of his sophomore year and served as a Army officer in 1918 then came to Toledo, Ohio where he was the President of the Toledo Automatic Ice Corporation in 1919. From there he became a realtor and moved back to Washington DC where he started his own realty company. He died rather young at age 49 in 1947.

Frederick Maywald had three children but none of them had children. Frederick's Boy Scout items have long ago dispersed to the winds of time. Graeme Smallwood also had three children and they in turn also had children. I was in contact with surviving family members who did an extensive search and found none of Graeme's Scouting memorabilia still among them. Stephen

Porter's badges are with a distant relative and he is fully aware of the potential significant value of the collection and has no plan to sell any part of it.

During the time that the Invention Merit Badge was available to earn which was again, 1911 through October 1, 1914, it was not the least earned merit badge of the original fifty seven available. One would presume that the reason the Invention badge was selected for extinction was because it was the least awarded during that time period but that was not the case. There were three other merit badges awarded less times than the Invention merit badge through October 1, 1914. They included Archery (two awarded by the end of 1914) and also Angling (Fishing) with just four awarded by the end of 1914. Stalking during that same time period only had eight awarded. The Invention merit badge was awarded a total of nine times by the end of 1914 and a tenth time in 1915. The National Committee on Badges, Awards and Scout Requirements likely determined that the Invention merit badge was the most difficult and perhaps most costly to earn. In 1914 the filing fee for a new patent was \$15 and the fee to issue a patent was another \$20. \$35 is not a lot today but it was back then. Then there was whatever costs you incurred in creating your invention. There were a total of 70,404 patents applied for during 1914 through the U. S. Patent Office. Presumably eight of them were for recipients of the Invention Merit Badge.

So do any of the other seven Invention merit badges still exist? Personally I am quite certain one or more does exist. My belief is that some local museum somewhere has one of them in their attic or archive but has no clue as to what they have. Or that some national entity such as the Smithsonian, the Library of Congress or the Rockefeller Archive has one (or more) in their vast storage facilities. So the search goes on. There are still seven to be found or determined not to have survived the last one hundred years.

Stephen Porter's story has been researched and written and will be published in an upcoming issue of the ISCA Journal. It will include photos of all fifty-seven of the original 1911 era BSA merit badges he earned by mid 1914. His unprecedented personally earned Boy Scout memorabilia collection numbers nearly seventy items, all of which are over one hundred years old, is scheduled to be on display at the Miakonda Scouting Museum in Toledo during Camp Miakonda's centennial year celebration in 2017. Miakonda is the oldest BSA camp in Ohio and the sixth oldest in the nation.

Special Thanks to Ben Wasner for allowing us to photograph the "False Sleeve" used in this article.

Requirements and Drawing from the 1911 Handbook

Invention

To obtain a merit badge for Invention a scout must

1. Invent and patent some useful article.
2. Show a working drawing or model of the same.

